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THE THIRTY-SEVENTH UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Two topics in particular occupied the Thirty-seventh University Convocation of the State of New York, which was held in the senate chamber at Albany, June 26-28, 1899.

The first of the questions was that of the unification of the State Supervision of Education. At present, as is well known, the educational system of the state is a dual one, the Regents of the University, a body whose origin dates from 1784, and whose members are elected by the legislature for life, have control of high schools, academies, and the other higher institutions of the state, while the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who is elected by the legislature for a term of three years, has charge of the primary schools and the certification of teachers. The recently defeated White Educational Bill proposed to abolish the office of State Superintendent of Education and to create a Commissioner of Education, whose functions should include the oversight of the high schools as well as of the common schools. The discussion of the White Educational Bill seems to have brought before the public consciousness the anomaly of the present system. This question was, therefore, felt to be one of paramount importance, especially as the debates in convocation might be expected to have some influence in shaping legislation.

In the absence of Chancellor Upson, Bishop Doane, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, presided. He welcomed the convocation in a brief address in which he emphasized the responsibility of the teacher's calling and the importance of the moral element in education.

The remainder of the evening was devoted to an address by Regent Whitelaw Reid. The speaker deprecated any tendency that would make a division between the common schools and the secondary schools of the state and regard the former as democratic, the latter as an aristocratic institutions, and declared that he was a poor democrat and a poor citizen of a democratic government who believed that a system of education providing for advances beyond the three R's was undemocratic. While the basis of popular education must always be the same, provision should be made in the most liberal way to meet the demands of modern education. The educational system of the state concerned

all the people, and they had a right to insist on having for it the best possible organization. The speaker was not there to complain that the existing double-headed arrangement was not working satisfactorily. But already in 1894 the Committee on Education in the Constitutional Convention deplored the lack of connection between the common school under the Superintendent of Education and the high school or academy under the Board of Regents as an unnecessary and serious break in the New York educational arrangements, and declared that the unification of this dual system would be to the advantage of all concerned.

If there was to be unification, Mr. Reid contended, the natural method suggested the Board of Regents as the guardians of the educational system. They had existed as a body since 1784, and were already in charge of the higher educational work of the state. Chosen, as they were, by successive legislatures, member by member, as vacancies arose, they combined, as a body, the advantages of permanence and gradual change. Pausing to consider objections to this, the natural, method of unification, the speaker asserted that no question of patronage had ever been permitted to shape the course of the regents, and insisted that only by placing the schools in their charge would it be possible to withdraw them permanently and securely from the realm of partisan politics.

The address of Mr. Reid was, as it were, the prelude to the discussion of Wednesday afternoon. The first speaker was the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Charles R. Skinner, who is *ex officio* a member of the Board of Regents. Superintendent Skinner declared that the present situation was awkward, irritating, and unnecessary.

Everybody wanted unification, and if we could agree upon an acceptable definition and then unite in securing such unification, it would be a happy day for every educational worker in the state. Unification, it was declared, meant that all public schools maintained in whole or in part by public taxation should be placed under one administrative head. "Locate that head where you will, but make one head." The superintendent knew of no reason why high schools should not be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the department of public instruction. Except the apportionment of money and inspection, the direction was already exclusive. The high school has existed and does exist without the fostering care of the regents. The superintendent "would enlarge the scope of the high school and make it absolutely

free to all pupils, providing by state aid for advantages now secured only by payment of tuition. Every child should be educated free in the high school nearest to him."

A letter was then read from President Andrew S. Draper, a former Superintendent of Public Instruction, in which the writer asserted the necessity of taking such action as should not only eliminate political influence from the educational work of the state, but should make it known to all that this had been done. After giving some reasons why he had recommended the Educational Committee of the last Constitutional Convention to vest the power to appoint the superintendent in the Board of Regents, the writer proceeded to express his confidence in the ability of the Board of Regents to meet any new responsibility, and declared that if the superintendent could have freedom and independence, and permanence of tenure, so long as he merited it by a judicious and fearless and aggressive exercise of the powers delegated to him by the state, and if all the educational work of the state could be brought under thoroughly harmonious and coöperative effort, then the educational system of the state would be almost ideal.

President Milne, of the Albany State Normal School, after discussing some of the difficulties of the present system, suggested a plan for creating a State Department of Education, of which the regents should have charge. The executive officer of the regents should be a commissioner of education, to be selected by the regents. The commissioner should be empowered to appoint directors, who should be specialists in their several departments. The commissioner ought not to be a specialist.

The chairman of the Statutory Revision Commission, Charles Z. Lincoln, after making some remarks with regard to the attitude of the legislature, stated that personally he favored a union of two departments. The state constitution stood in the way of the complete abolition of the Board of Regents, and unification, therefore, must come through them. But, should the present board be reorganized? Prominent members of the legislature, the speaker declared, had assured him that unification through the Board of Regents without a reorganization of that body was impossible, and there were in the history of the state numerous precedents for such reorganization.

President James M. Taylor, of Vassar College, expressed himself in favor of unification, but believed that a new system, to be safe, must be beyond the reach of politics. A school commission ought to be named by the governor to draw up a bill unifying the school system.

At present the appointment of the superintendent ought to be made by the regents, but the superintendent should have a long term of office and should be to a large extent independent.

The discussion, which was continued by representative teachers and educational authorities of the state, showed clearly that the opinion of the assemblage was practically unanimous in favor of the unification of the school system under the oversight of the regents. At the close of the session two separate resolutions were offered, one by President Taylor, of Vassar, the other by Regent McKelway, to express the sentiment of the meeting. These resolutions were finally referred to a committee which, Wednesday morning, reported as follows :

Resolved, that this convocation request the governor to name an honorary commission representative of the various educational interests of the state which shall consider ways and means of unifying the present educational systems, and give such assistance as the statutory revision commission may desire in the preparation of a bill to be submitted to the legislature at the opening of the next session.

The resolution was accepted without debate.

The other principal topic for discussion which only in a less degree engaged the attention of the convocation, stood thus in the program :

Qualifications of High School Teachers.—The state has decreed [laws of 1895, ch. 1031] that an elementary school teacher must have at least a secondary school education, with one additional year of professional training. Should not secondary school teachers be required to have a college education, with at least one additional year of professional training, if such training was not part of the college course ?

The opening address was made by Superintendent William H. Maxwell, of New York. The training of the citizen, he said, is the most vital concern of the state. In the secondary schools are trained most of the men who become prominent in the various walks of life and most of the men and women who become teachers of children in the secondary schools. A long step forward was taken when in 1895 the statute was enacted that no one should be licensed or employed to teach in primary or grammar grades in any city of the state who has not had three years of experience in teaching, or in lieu thereof was graduated from a high school and from a course of professional training of at least one year. After showing how different in character are the pupils in the elementary schools from those in the high schools, and pointing out that the knowledge to be taught in the elementary

school differs from the knowledge to be taught in the high school as empiricism differs from science, the speaker declared that different qualifications and different training were necessary, for the high-school teacher. These qualifications were to be classed under the heads of general knowledge, professional knowledge, special knowledge, and technical skill. The subcommittee of the Committee of Fifteen had declared that "The degree of scholarship required for secondary teachers is by common consent fixed at a collegiate education. No one with rare exceptions should be employed to teach in a high school who has not this fundamental preparation." The speaker believed that if it be admitted that these four qualifications were essential, it ought not to be difficult to frame a statute requiring them as a prerequisite to a high-school license. Such a statute should forbid the licensing or appointment of any person to teach in the high schools of the state who has not been graduated from a college of arts approved by the regents, who has not made a profound study of the principles and history of education, and who has not devoted at least one year to graduate work in the special subject or group of subjects he proposes to teach, and to the acquirement of technical skill in secondary teaching. In addition the applicant should be required to prove his fitness by a vigorous examination. Such a statute should not prevent promotion of teachers from the elementary grades to the high-school grades. The speaker favored the insertion of a clause in the statute permitting the licensing of college graduates and of all others who have taught in the seventh and eighth years of the elementary course, who have made special studies outside of school hours, and who pass the necessary examinations. Finally the speaker discussed some possible objections to such a measure and declared that the enactment of a statute establishing high requirements for high-school licenses would make the high schools the true people's colleges.

Dean James E. Russell of the Teachers College, New York, in the course of his remarks, which followed, urged that there should be no blanket-certificate, but that certificates should be issued on the basis of examinations in the subjects which the candidate proposed to teach, and a teacher should not be allowed to teach a subject not covered by his certificate.

Professor Charles De Garmo, of Cornell University, thought that the discussion so far had been unduly occupied with the question of the candidate's scholarship to the neglect of professional training. The speaker deprecated the fact that the competition of women teachers

was rapidly driving men from the high schools, and he believed a remedy for this evil was to be found by insisting more strongly upon the professional element in the teacher's training.

In the more general discussion that followed not a little opposition was developed to the proposed requirement of the arts course as a preliminary to the certification of high-school teachers. Some of the principals seemed to feel that such a limitation would exclude from the schools many teachers of character and ability and the debate failed to discover any great degree of unanimity in regard to the qualifications of secondary teachers.

Tuesday evening the convocation listened to an address by President Harper, of the University of Chicago, on "Waste in Education." President Harper's paper was an able and incisive criticism of the waste of effort and resources in our educational system from the elementary school up to the university.

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